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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001938

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TAGS: PHUM CVIS ECON KCRM KWMN PGOV PREL SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: JIZZAKH ANTI-TRAFFICKING NGO DESCRIBES COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS

REF: TASHKENT 1419

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a trip to Jizzakh province on October 31, poloff met with local officials and a local NGO to discuss trafficking-in-persons (TIP). Local NGO leader Nazifa Kamilova, whose organization has received some government assistance, complained that more needed to be done to strengthen anti-TIP efforts. Kamilova also said a local organization, the Jizzakh Business Incubator, was involved in human trafficking and U.S. visa fraud. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a trip to Jizzakh province on October 31, poloff met with Nazifa Kamilova, the head of the Jizzakh province branch of the anti-trafficking NGO Istiqbolli Avlod (Note: The province branches of Istiqbolli Avlod, although sharing a common name, operate as separate NGOs, with the Tashkent branch unofficially representing the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Uzbekistan. End note.) Currently in their third year of a five-year action plan, Kamilova's NGO has held anti-trafficking events at local educational institutions, publicized information on trafficking in the local media and provided human rights training to local law enforcement officials. The NGO also was given a grant from USAID (via IOM/Istiqbolli Avlod Tashkent) to operate an emergency anti-trafficking hotline, which receives an average of 180 calls a month, approximately two or three of which are from trafficking victims abroad seeking assistance in returning to Jizzakh (the hotline number is advertised in prisons in countries that receive a large number of Uzbek trafficking victims, such as the United Arab Emirates.)

¶3. (C) During their first meeting, which was held in the presence of hokimiyat (provincial administration) officials, Kamilova stressed to poloff the "high level" of cooperation and support her organization has received from the government, noting in particular that they have been provided office space free of charge from the local branch of the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (LDPU), one of the five legally registered parties in Parliament. In October 2006, her NGO received a one-year grant worth 5.5 million soums (4,430 dollars) from the National Association of NGOs (an ostensibly independent, but government-controlled organization). In addition, the local Women's Committee (another state-controlled organization) has helped victims returning to Jizzakh find employment, and, in one case, paid

for the treatment of a victim who had contracted tuberculosis.

¶ 14. (C) According to her, local media outlets have run anti-trafficking advertisements free of charge. The local Jizzakh television station, "Bakhtiyor Shahbos," has run a one-minute commercial twice a week, the local "Samzar" radio station has run a thirty second commercial three times a week and the local paper, "Jizzakh Pravda," has carried an advertisement for the anti-trafficking hotline in every issue. In addition, the provincial newspaper for lawyers, "Adolat," has run several articles about trafficking and its victims.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING EVENT AT LOCAL MOSQUE

¶ 15. (C) Kamilova also described a recent anti-trafficking seminar held at Jizzakh's Kuch-Chinor mosque which brought together more than 80 imams from across the province. The event was organized with the support of the Women's Committee and the hokimiyat's advisor on spiritual issues. According to Kamilova, this was the first time she was aware of when women were invited into a mosque to give a presentation to imams. Her organization was warmly received by the imams, who appeared very interested in learning more about the issue.

ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS OF MOVIE "HUMAN TRAFFICKING"

¶ 16. (C) Poloff originally met Kamilova when she traveled to Tashkent in July to attend the Embassy's screening of the

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movie "Human Trafficking" (reftel). Kamilova later borrowed a copy from Istiqbolli Avlod in Tashkent and has since held several screenings of the movie at anti-trafficking seminars in Jizzakh, including for law enforcement officials. In each case, the movie was positively received by the audience. Kamilova said that she already had discussed broadcasting the movie with Bakhtiyor Shahbos TV, who agreed to show an edited version if the necessary broadcast rights could be granted.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING ART CONTEST AT LOCAL SCHOOL

¶ 17. (C) After the meeting, poloff went with Kamilova and the hokimiyat officials to preside over an anti-trafficking art contest at the Jizzakh art lyceum, a boarding school for disadvantaged children with artistic potential in the 5th through 9th grades. Kamilova noted that such children, mostly orphans, were vulnerable to trafficking, and therefore, she held frequent events at the school. During her last event, she organized the art contest by giving the students one month to paint anti-trafficking posters.

¶ 18. (C) Upon arriving at the school, poloff was treated like a visiting dignitary and presented with large bouquets of flowers, presents, and the traditional bread and salt, all the while being filmed by Bakhtiyor Shahbos TV. Poloff was asked to judge the more than 30 paintings and choose first, second and third places (poloff was later informed that, in fact, the school had already chosen the winners.) Poloff was genuinely impressed by both the students' artistry, as well as the understanding they displayed of the dangers of human trafficking. Along with Kamilova and the local officials, poloff then handed out prizes to the winners.

¶ 19. (C) Poloff had arranged with Kamilova in advance to participate in the art contest, but without the presence of hokimiyat officials. As Kamilova later explained, the officials at the Jizzakh hokimiyat called her the day before the event and instructed her to invite them and to change the time to fit their schedule. (Comment: In accordance with GOU demands, the Embassy notifies the MFA in advance of all

official travel by State Department officers. Our planned itinerary is often shared as well, to avoid cancellation of events. End comment.)

SEPARATE MEETING ALONE WITH KAMILOVA

¶10. (C) After the contest, poloff returned to Kamilova's office to continue their conversation without the presence of local officials. The tone of the second meeting was markedly different, with Kamilova emphasizing the lack of support she received from local officials. The hokimiyat, as she stated, "ne meshaet, ne pomogaet," or in other words, it neither interfered in her activities, nor supported them. According to her, most of the support she received from hokimiyat officials lacked substance. She also blamed government corruption for exasperating the trafficking problem for labor migrants, specifically accusing the Ministry of Labor's Agency for Foreign Labor Migration Affairs, which arranges foreign labor contracts for Uzbek citizens in countries such as South Korea, of demanding bribes between 3,000 and 5,000 dollars from each applicant.

¶11. (C) Kamilova also expressed concerned about the long-term financial viability of her organization, noting that her one grant from the National NGO Association already expired in October and her other grant from USAID (via IOM/Istiqbolli Avlod in Tashkent) to operate the anti-trafficking hotline would run out in November. Kamilova also told poloff about her ideas for future projects, including organizing a children's theater to raise awareness on trafficking issues. Poloff encouraged Kamilova to apply for a grant with the Embassy's Democracy Commission and from government sources, including the National NGO Association and a new Cabinet of Ministers program to provide state funding to NGOs in the form of subsidies and grants.

JIZZAKH BUSINESS INCUBATOR ACCUSED OF TRAFFICKING

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¶12. (C) Kamilova told poloff that her NGO was involved in a criminal case in September against the Jizzakh Business Incubator, which it accused of facilitating the trafficking of over 200 Uzbek labor migrants to Russia. According to Kamilova, the Jizzakh Business Incubator falsely claimed to be affiliated with the United Nations, and for a fee, offered to find employment for individuals in Russia. Those who paid were then transported to Russia by bus and were dropped off at various locations between Krasnodar and Moscow, at which point their passports were allegedly seized by accomplices and they were forced to work at construction sites with little or no remuneration. At least 82 of the victims later returned to Uzbekistan and participated in the criminal case against the organization, though Kamilova is unsure of what happened to the other victims. Two individuals at the Business Incubator, Umarkul Ugamov and the organization's accountant, were convicted of trafficking and received a two-year sentence and an 8,000 dollar fine (approximately 100 dollars for each victim), but their prison sentence was immediately commuted, and their conviction remains under appeal.

¶13. (C) Kamilova said that the Jizzakh Business Incubator also has been involved in U.S. visa fraud, helping to send three women to the United States in 2005 and 2006, ostensibly to study English for nine months. Relatives approached Kamilova and told her that they have not had any contact with the women since they left Uzbekistan. She fears that the three women may have been trafficked for sexual exploitation. According to her, four additional individuals are currently applying for U.S. visas to study English through the Business Incubator. Kamilova said that she approached the four individuals and warned them, but they refused to believe her. The Business Incubator reportedly charged each of the

applicants different amounts, ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 dollars. It also claimed (falsely) that it had a contact within the Embassy who arranged for the visas to be issued.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Despite her harsh criticism of local officials during her second meeting alone with poloff, it is clear that the government has given Kamilova's NGO substantive support, including providing it with rent-free office space and a grant worth almost 5,000 dollars (serious money here). Nevertheless, with the financial sustainability of her organization in question, the government has a clear opportunity to assist in combating trafficking by providing additional assistance to NGOs like Kamilova's, potentially through the National Association of NGOs or a new program adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers on April 28, under which officially registered NGOs engaging are eligible to receive state subsidies and grants.

¶15. (C) Consular officer could find no record of English students sponsored by the Jizzakh Business Incubator being issued visas during the time period alleged by Kamilova. In October, a group of potential conference participants sponsored by the Jizzakh Business Incubator were refused visas under INA Section 214B. The consular section's Fraud Prevention Unit is now aware of potential fraud through the Jizzakh Business Incubator and will continue to investigate the case.

NORLAND